

An important story to tell

By STEVE DONOVAN
SPECIAL TO THE CLIPPER

His brick reads: Robert D Byrne, 6th Armd Cavalry Regt.

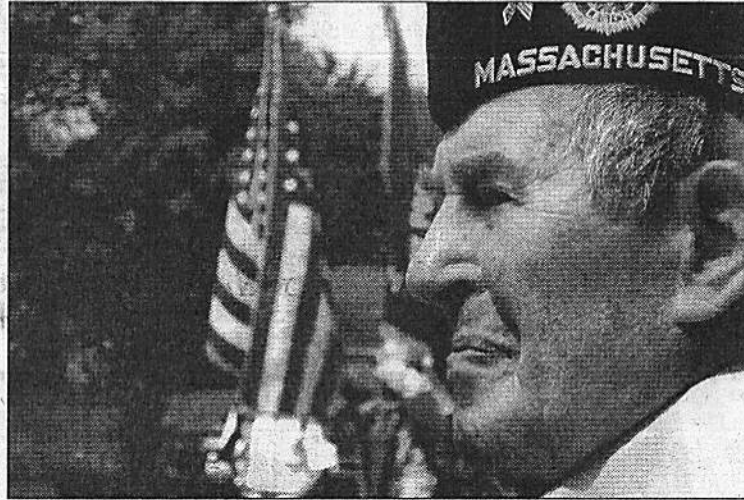
Robert D. Byrne is in rehab at Bay Path Nursing getting back on his feet after a bad infection. He didn't think his story interesting enough to merit an interview.

THE MONUMENT BRICKS

Bricks for Memories; each brick suggests a story and helps to provide the funding to rebuild and refurbish a once lost Duxbury monument. The monument lists those from Duxbury who served their nation in World War One. The bricks bear the names and sentiments of others, some once in uniform, some still in uniform, some who served their loved ones in other ways and all of them recognized for and by those they touched.

If you purchased a brick in someone's memory, call and let us tell the story your gift hints at. The bricks series is written by Steve Donovan. He can be reached at 781-837-7782.

Byrne was born in 1927 in Boston. At an early age he came to Duxbury to live with his aunt and uncle, Eden and Jennie Keene Glover, whom he described as "two of the finest people in the world." Byrne's father, Fred had also been brought up by the Glovers and wanted his son to be raised as he was. Robert's dad, Fred, was a taxi driver in Boston and his mom, Tena, worked as a waitress. They entrusted Byrne's upbringing to Eden and Jennie knowing that their son would be safer in the country town of Duxbury.



Mr. Byrne was back on his feet and in attendance at the recent Veteran's Day memorial services held at the American Legion Hall, where he once attended Boy Scout meetings. He is out of rehab, looking great and once again comfortably living with his family in their Chestnut Street home.

Courtesy Photo

Often on weekends, 10-year-old Byrne would ride the train and be met at Boston's South Station by his parents. On other weekends Fred and Tina visited his and the Glovers in Duxbury.

The family has a long Duxbury history. his grandfather, Fred D. Byrne, was in charge of the international cable station in Duxbury in 1903. That cable office was located at the corner of St. George and Washington Streets and backed up to the Bluefish River. The building still stands but is now a residence.

Byrne was a Boy Scout and remembers attending scout meetings in the Millbrook School. That building, at the intersection of Route 14 and Tremont Street, is now the American Legion Hall. He said it was donated by the town to the veterans of WWI for their meeting place after the Armistice.

Byrne's first taste of school was in a one-room schoolhouse just east of the old Holy Family Church on Cedar Street, now the South Shore Conservatory. He attended second through fourth grades at the Village School near the Windsor House on

Washington Street. When the Village School was finally torn down, its stone foundation was moved to Mattakeesett Court and used as the current break-water. A private residence now occupies the old school site. Byrne went on to attend grades five through twelve in the high school that now serves as the Duxbury Free Library.

Robert Byrne has witnessed many changes to the face of Duxbury in his eighty-three years.

During his youth, starting at the age of 14-15, he worked as a plumber's helper for Wirt's Plumbing on Bay Road and also drove a fire truck as a volunteer fireman at the station then located at the beginning of Chestnut Street at Hall's Corner. The "fire department" was at that time made up of volunteers with the single exception of Richard Whitney, the town's one permanent fireman.

One of Byrne's first employers was Eben Briggs, who was the Duxbury Fire Chief and the owner of an oil company in Duxbury. He hired Byrne to drive an oil delivery truck. Eben Briggs was a veteran of World War One. His name is inscribed on the monument rising above Byrne's brick.

At the age of eighteen Byrne joined the Army as a Private to fight in World War II. He was trained at Fort Knox, Kentucky as a tank driver. His mechanized unit was in training for the invasion of Japan. He was stationed in California, waiting in to be deployed to the Pacific War Zone, when two atomic bombs burst, the first over Hiroshima, and the second, three days later, over Nagasaki. After six days the Japanese Emperor surrendered and WWII was over.

Byrne's unit was sent to Germany to run tank patrols in the 6th Armored Cavalry Regiment. He was promoted to buck sergeant. In Europe he attended the Army's Constabulary School and served with the army of occupation in southern Bavaria. He described post-war Germany as an uneasy place where many ex-Nazis still posed a threat. The day Hermann Goering,

Commander in Chief of Hitler's Luftwaffe, committed suicide in his Nuremberg jail cell, Byrne's unit was put on high alert. Their beefed up presence on the streets of Germany kept things quiet.

By 1947 Byrne's enlistment was up. He had risen to rank of Staff Sergeant and the Army urged him in various ways to re-enlist. He didn't re-up but did join the reserves for three years. Byrne returned to Duxbury and resumed working for the fire department as well as for his friend and former employer, Eben Briggs, who rehired him for his old job delivering oil.

In 1951 Robert married his wife, Dorothy Nogueira from Kingston, and in 1954 joined the Duxbury Police Department. The first chief of police Robert served under was Jim O'Neil. Chief O'Neil's name is also inscribed on the World War One monument, above Byrne brick.

Another name carved on that monument is Gladys Reynolds, a World War One nurse who married one of her Doughboy patients, Frank Dwyer. Byrne described her as "being in the thick of it over in France in World War One". Byrne remembered that Frank and Gladys Dwyer lived on Surplus Street after their marriage. He recalled that when the original WWI monument was struck and demolished by a plow, Gladys always insisted it should be restored. She must be resting easy; it stands again.

He retired from the Duxbury Police Department in 1991 but continued to work details until 1994 before hanging up his uniform.

He is now just days away from going home. His wife Dorothy died in 2000 but he still lives in their home on Chestnut Street with his daughter Joyce and her family. He has two great-grandchildren, Liam and Cameron, and their photographs almost eclipse the mirror in his Bay Path room.

Robert Byrne had an interesting story to tell after all.